Resurrecting Democracy

Through a case study of community organizing in the global city of London and an examination of the legacy of Saul Alinsky around the world, this book develops a constructive account of the relationship between religious diversity, democratic citizenship, and economic and political accountability. Based on an in-depth, ethnographic study, Part I identifies and depicts a consociational, populist, and faithfully secular vision of democratic citizenship by reflecting on the different strands of thought and practice that feed into and help constitute community organizing. Particular attention is given to how organizing mediates the relationship between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism and those without a religious commitment in order to forge a common life. Part II then unpacks the implications of this vision for how we respond to the spheres in which citizenship is enacted, namely, civil society, the sovereign nation-state, and the globalized economy. Overall, the book outlines a way of re-imagining democracy, developing innovative public policy, and addressing poverty in the contemporary context.

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The most enduring and illuminating bodies of late nineteenth-century social theory—by Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and others—emphasized the integration of religion, polity, and economy through time and place. Once a staple of classic social theory, however, religion gradually lost the interest of many social scientists during the twentieth century. The recent emergence of phenomena such as Solidarity in Poland; the dissolution of the Soviet empire; various South American, Southern African, and South Asian liberation movements; the Christian Right in the United States; and Al Qaeda have reawakened scholarly interest in religiously based political conflict. At the same time, fundamental questions are once again being asked about the role of religion in stable political regimes, public policies, and constitutional orders. The series Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics produces volumes that study religion and politics by drawing from classic social theory and more recent social-scientific research traditions. Books in the series offer theoretically grounded, comparative, empirical studies that raise “big” questions about a timely subject that has long engaged the best minds in social science.

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Resurrecting Democracy

Path, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life

LUKE BREThERTON

Duke University
For Isaac

So that there may be a world for you to laugh in
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Acknowledgments

When I began researching this book in 2007, few people I spoke with had heard of either community organizing or the Corporation of the City of London, or had much to say on the relationship between the church and different forms of direct action and participatory democracy. Moreover, they thought their financial future was secure. By 2014, when I finished researching and writing the book, the president of the United States was a former community organizer, the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom had made it government policy to train 5,000 community organizers, the financial system was going through a systemic crisis, and a confrontation between St. Paul’s Cathedral and the Occupy Movement in 2012 had not only made the church’s response to direct action front-page news but also brought the Corporation of the City of London to national consciousness in the United Kingdom.

A further dramatic change of circumstances accompanied the production of this book. I began the research with my friend and colleague Maurice Glasman. The book was originally conceived as a joint project with him. But events took a different turn. Questions generated by our research and relationships he built through it led him to become a catalytic figure in the development of “Blue Labour” as a vision for the future direction of the Labour Party. In terms of mainstream political policies and practice, what felt like speculations on the impossible in 2007 became intense deliberations over the probable by 2011. The full story of Blue Labour must be told elsewhere, but it forms a tacit backdrop to this work because much of the thinking related to Blue Labour as a political project grew out of the thinking, conversations, and research that informed this book. So for his intellectual contribution, companionship, and sheer vitality of presence, I thank Maurice.

I extend deep thanks to Neil Jameson without whom Citizens UK would not exist and whose drive and commitment seem to know no bounds. His active support and openness to this work were crucial to its realization. In
addition to Neil, this whole project would not have been possible without the trust, conversation, and friendship of Stefan Baskerville, Matthew Bolton, Julie Camancho, Bernadette Farrell, Mike Gecan, Arnie Graaf, Lisa Jamoul, Jonathan Lange, Mike Miller, Leo Penta, Gerald Taylor, Colin Weatherup, and numerous other organizers I had the great privilege to learn from and be tutored by. And I am grateful to Helen Bevan and Marshall Ganz for pointing me to other arenas in which organizing might be applicable, such as healthcare. A large note of thanks must also go to the leaders within Citizens UK who were willing to talk to or be interviewed by me, and whose commitment to the work of organizing is a wonder to behold given all the competing demands on their lives.

Alongside the organizers and leaders, a set of academic collaborators and conversation partners were crucial in generating and guiding the development of this book. Particular thanks must go to Harry Boyte, Jane Wills, and Richard Wood who were insightful and vital interlocutors all along the way. I must also thank David Ford, John Milbank, Mark Warren, and Jon Wilson for important discussions of different aspects of the work. For their support in developing the initial research proposal out of which this book emerged, I thank my former colleagues at King’s College London: Alan Cribb, Jeremy Hodgson, Alister McGrath, and Christopher Winch. I am grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for the grant that made the initial research possible. For their encouragement, comments on, and conversations about earlier drafts I thank Kate Bowler, Stanley Hauerwas, and Jeffrey Stout, as well as Charles Mathewes and all the presenters and participants in the workshop on a draft of the manuscript held at the University of Virginia’s Center for the Study of Religion in 2013. For his help with archiving material and compiling data for the graphs I thank Brian Manchester. For help with the graphs themselves I thank Angela Zoss. I am deeply grateful for the invaluable editorial work and guidance provided by Jennifer Benedict and Judith Heyhoe. And for being willing to take a risk with a book such as this I thank the commissioning editors of this series (Richard Wood, Kenneth D. Wald, and David C. Leege) and Lewis Bateman and Shaun Vigil at Cambridge University Press.

Lastly, for the many late nights, early mornings, and absent weekends demanded by the research I must gratefully acknowledge the patience and goodwill of my wife Caroline and children Gabriel and Isaac. A measure of the cumulative impact of the research process on our family was that, toward the end of the research, when asked after church one Sunday what his father did, my youngest replied with earnest innocence: “He’s a politician.”

Parts of Chapter 1 have been taken, with revisions, from an article that appeared in *The Good Society Journal*, volume 21, number 2 (2012) under the title “The Populist Politics of Broad-Based Organizing.” Parts of Chapter 3 have been taken, with revisions, from an article that appeared in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, volume 79, number 2 (2011) under the title “A Postsecular Politics? Inter-Faith Relations as a Civic Practice.”
Acknowledgments

of Chapter 7 have been taken, with revisions, from an essay that appeared in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology & Modern European Thought*, edited by Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) under the title “Sovereignty.” Parts of Chapter 8 have been taken, with revisions, from an article that appeared in *Modern Theology*, volume 27, number 3 (2011) under the title “‘Love Your Enemies’: Usury, Citizenship & the Friend-Enemy Distinction.” Parts of the Appendix, with revisions, are from an article that appeared in *Modern Theology*, volume 28, number 2 (2012) under the title “Coming to Judgment: Methodological Reflections on the Relationship between Ecclesiology, Ethnography and Political Theory.” The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

Lent 2014